

# Lovecraft Studies 13



## CONTENTS

- 43 Who Needs the "Cthulhu Mythos"? . . . . . *David E. Schultz*
- 54 In Search of Arkham Country. . . . . *Will Murray*
- 68 Correspondence between R. H. Barlow and Wilson Shepherd of  
Oakman, Alabama—Sept.-Nov. 1932 . . . . . *H. P. Lovecraft*
- 72 Lovecraft and Chiasmus, Chiasmus and  
Lovecraft. . . . . *Donald R. Burleson*
- 76 Reviews:
- H. P. Lovecraft, *Commonplace Book* (ed. David E. Schultz)  
Reviewed by *Steven J. Mariconda*
- H. P. Lovecraft, *Uncollected Letters* (ed. S. T. Joshi)  
Reviewed by *Robert M. Price*

*Lovecraft Studies*

Volume 5, Number 2

Fall 1986

Published October 1, 1986

Cover by Jason Eckhardt

Copyright © 1986 by Necronomicon Press

*Lovecraft Studies* is published twice a year, in Spring and in Fall. Price per issue is \$4.00 in U.S. funds. Orders should be sent to the publisher, Necronomicon Press, 101 Lockwood Street, West Warwick RI 02893.

Articles and letters should be sent to the editor, S. T. Joshi, 281 4th Street #3, Jersey City, NJ 07302, and must be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope if return is desired. All reviews are assigned. Literary rights for articles and reviews will reside with *Lovecraft Studies* for one year after publication, at which time they shall revert to the respective authors. Payment is made in contributor's copies.

# Who Needs the "Cthulhu Mythos"?

by David E. Schultz

As to overdoing the "Hastur" idea—of course I realise the danger of this, & have dozens of notebook entries of a totally different character. The only reason these have been postponed in favour of the "Whisperer" & "Mts. of Madness" is that the plots of these latter veritably thrust themselves on my attention and demanded to be written first.

—H. P. Lovecraft to August Derleth

23 May 1931

Will Murray's modest proposal in *Lovecraft Studies* 12 (Spring 1986) offers another point of view in the current debate over H. P. Lovecraft's so-called "Cthulhu Mythos". As Murray says, the debate about which Lovecraft stories belong to the Mythos and which do not (the dubious "contributions" of other writers notwithstanding) has become rather heated, and it does not appear that the matter will soon be settled. We all agree, certainly, that Mythos fiction written after Lovecraft's death is not for significant consideration in the study of Lovecraft's writing. However, Lovecraft's comments about his pseudomythology, as he referred to it in his own writings and those of his contemporaries, are of great importance in understanding the development and proliferation of the mythological elements that he used in his stories.

Murray boldly suggests that we limit the "Mythos" to three of Lovecraft's most "cosmic" stories from a period just before he began to pollute his mythic concepts by borrowing from other writers and introducing his fictional elements into the stories of his ghost-writing clients. Bold as this suggestion is, it ultimately compounds the problem and merely introduces yet another opinion regarding which Lovecraft stories do or do not belong to the "Mythos". The solution, I think, is far simpler and lies in cleanly severing the Gordian knot to eliminate the problem effectively and permanently. S. T. Joshi has said that my suggestion—to abandon the concept and term "Cthulhu Mythos" (or Lovecraft Mythos, for that matter)—is "extreme",<sup>1</sup> but I disagree. Rather, I see ignoring August Derleth's ill-conceived term as taking the middle course between Scylla and Charybdis.

Before we discuss the problems of the "Cthulhu Mythos", we must understand why the term came into existence. Lovecraft himself never used such a term and most would agree that he would have had no use for one. Lovecraft once tossed off the term "Arkham cycle" in a letter to Clark Ashton Smith (SL II.246), but as far as we know, he never stipulated which stories belong

---

1. S. T. Joshi, "The Development of Lovecraftian Studies, 1971-1982 (Part III)", *Lovecraft Studies*, No. 11 (Fall 1985) 59.

to that story-cycle. Presumably, "The Picture in the House" (1920), "Herbert West—Reanimator" (1921-22), and even "The Terrible Old Man" (1920) would belong to the "Arkham cycle". ("The terrible Old Man", though it does not mention *Arkham*, is set in the fictitious town of Kingsport, a town that figures into many stories set in the same geographical area as *Arkham*.) Lovecraft made occasional tongue-in-cheek references to the mythic background of his stories with such names as "Yog-Sothothery" or "Cthulhuism", but at those times he was merely speaking humorously. He politely resisted an early attempt by August Derleth to attach the name "The Mythology of Hastur" to the potpourri of fact and folklore mentioned in "The Whisperer in Darkness" (1930). He wrote to Derleth:

It's not a bad idea to call this Cthulhuism & Yog-Sothothery of mine "The Mythology of Hastur"—although it was really from Machen & Dunsany & others rather than through the Bierce-Chambers line, that I picked up my gradually developing hash of theogony—or daimonogeny. Come to think of it, I guess I sling this stuff more as Chambers does than as Machen & Dunsany do—though I had written a good deal of it before I ever suspected that Chambers even wrote a weird story! I feel flattered by your adoption of some of this background. Robert E. Howard is doing it too. In making your allusions don't forget Klarkash-Ton's accursed & amorphous *Tsathoggua*, whom I have adopted into my malignantly leering family pantheon! I shall identify Smith's Hyperborea with my Olathoe in the land of Lomar. (16 May 1931; ms., State Historical Society of Wisconsin)

I quote this passage at length because it is one of several in which Lovecraft subtly explained the reason for the allusions he and other writers made to each other's stories, and because it shows Lovecraft's mock enthusiasm about the matter. It should be noted that it was at this time that Derleth was writing the first of his numerous "Mythos" stories, "The Lair of the Star-Spawn".

There is no denying that Lovecraft suggested that Derleth make continued reference to this expanding base of quasi-mythological background material. He was indignant when he learned that Farnsworth Wright of *Weird Tales* rejected Derleth's story, "The Horror from the Lake" (i.e. "The Evil Ones")—at about the time Wright rejected his *At the Mountains of Madness*—because of allusion to Lovecraft's mythological elements, even to the extent of lifting entire phrases from Lovecraft's stories. Lovecraft wrote:

As for Wright's rejections, as so interestingly transcribed in your letter—it almost nullifies the sting of his latest rejection to see his irrational & inattentive capriciousness so amusingly revealed on a large scale! Of all Boeotian blundering & irrelevancy! And what pointless censure of the introduction of Cthulhu & Yog-Sothoth—as if their use constituted any "infringement" on my stuff! Hades! The more these synthetic daemons are mutually written up by different authors, the better they become as general background-material. I like to have others use my Azathoths & Nyarlathoteps—and in return I shall use Klarkash-Ton's *Tsathoggua*, your monk Clithanus, & Howard's Bran. Indeed, I shall tell Wright of my attitude when next I write him. You have not used the "Elder Ones" any more specifically than Smith uses them in "The Holiness of Azédarac" (where he speaks of "Yog-Sothot" &c)—which Wright has taken. (3 August 1931; ms., State Historical Society of Wisconsin)

Lovecraft's statement that he liked to have others "use" his material was easily misconstrued by Derleth. Even though Lovecraft said his "Azathoths

and Nyarlathotep" had become "general background-material", his emphasis seemed to be toward encouraging people to write stories about those things, though that was not really the case.

Lovecraft extended similar encouragement to other young writers. He wrote to Willis Conover: "I'll be interested to hear of your own contribution to horrific bibliography. Perhaps I'll mention it some time in a tale, since members of the *Weird Tales* group frequently use one another's synthetic daemons and forbidden books as background accessories."<sup>2</sup>

As Murray has shown, Lovecraft was certainly his own worst enemy when it came to the expansion of his mythological background. What had started as a casual gesture, much like the tipping of hats between gentlemen, was soon less gracefully done. Whereas Lovecraft and Smith would make tantalizing allusions to elements from each other's work without detracting from the integrity of their own work, many younger writers (Derleth was only twenty-two in 1931, Conover was but fifteen in 1937) aggressively sought to "contribute" to the myth pattern merely for the sake of making the "contribution" and, in their eyes, placing themselves in the same league as Lovecraft and Smith and other established professionals. They can hardly be blamed because it seemed to them that many other writers—actually Lovecraft himself who was ghost-writing stories for others—had successfully made such allusions themselves. As we can see, Lovecraft encouraged reference to his pseudomythology, but in the three quotations above the careful reader will note that Lovecraft says the pseudomythology is *background* to be referred to only occasionally.

Following Lovecraft's death on 15 March 1937, August Derleth, with breathtaking swiftness, began planning a memorial collection of Lovecraft's works. The full impact of his effort with Donald Wandrei to publish *The Outsider and Others* is scarcely comprehensible, but we know that in less than two weeks' time Derleth was already writing to Lovecraft's friends for material to publish. Not only did he devote much energy to *The Outsider*, but he also wrote a tribute and a poem in Lovecraft's memory and quickly completed what he would call a "Cthulhu Mythos" story that he had begun five years before. These events, stimulated by Lovecraft's death, accelerated the genesis of the "Cthulhu Mythos".

Derleth never used the term "Mythology of Hastur" after Lovecraft casually brushed it aside, but he did not understand why Lovecraft was less than enthusiastic about it. In fact, Derleth seems to have missed the entire point of Lovecraft's statement, otherwise he would not have devised another term in which he merely substituted the word *Cthulhu* for *Hastur*. Quite simply, Lovecraft recognized that a formal designation and structure would have been the worst thing for a mythic background that was fragmented and unstructured and only hinted at for effect. Only Clark Ashton Smith seems to have considered the possibility that Lovecraft's pseudomythology was intentionally unstructured for the purpose of creating a greater sense

---

2. Lovecraft to Willis Conover, 2 August 1936, cited in *Lovecraft at Last* (Arlington, VA: Carrollton-Clark, 1975), p. 40.

of realism, and that occasional ragtag references by other writers contributed to that sense. Smith suggested this possibility to Derleth when Derleth was compiling *The Outsider and Others*, but, as we will see in many other instances, Derleth ignored the advice of someone better attuned to Lovecraft's cosmic sense. Thus, it is no surprise that eleven of the final twelve stories in *The Outsider* are stories Derleth considered to be "of the Cthulhu Mythos", or that he ignored Smith's recommendation that "The Colour out of Space" not be included among them but instead somewhere among the other tales.

Smith wrote to Derleth:

As to the varying references to the mythos in different tales: I wonder if they weren't designed to suggest the diverse developments and interpretations of old myths and deities that spring up over great periods of time and in variant races and civilizations? I have intentionally done something of the sort in my own myth-creation. . . . I believe [such a] theory would account for the discrepant characters given to Azathoth, Nyarlathotep, etc., in different stories. Cthulhu contains the germ of the mythos; the Dunwich Horror introduces Yog-Sothoth; and I am inclined to think the first mention of Azathoth occurs in Fungi from Yuggoth and The Whisperer in Darkness. Evidently HPL developed and varied the mythos as he went on. I believe the theory I have outlined above will afford the best explanation of discrepancies: HPL wished to indicate the natural growth of a myth-pattern through dim ages, in which the same deity or demon might present changing aspects. (28 April 1937; ms., State Historical Society of Wisconsin)

Smith recognized that Lovecraft did not need to construct a rigidly structured pantheon for his stories to be effective. He realized that when Lovecraft used the words "pantheon" and "gods" in relation to certain of his stories, he was using them metaphorically as a way to convey the utter alienness of the creatures he conceived. Thus, Lovecraft did not "fail" to provide certain entities in his pantheon, necessitating that other writers make up for his various lapses. Lovecraft never intended for there to be such entities.

During Lovecraft's lifetime, his friends and colleagues often mentioned Lovecraft's "mythology", the "Lovecraft mythology" or even the "Cthulhu Mythology" in their correspondence, so although Lovecraft does not seem to have used any such terms, several were in use while he was alive. The earliest reference to the "Cthulhu Mythology" in print is found following Lovecraft's death in Derleth's article, "H. P. Lovecraft, Outsider", which appeared in the June 1937 number of *River*:

After a time there became apparent in his tales a curious coherence, a myth-pattern so convincing that after its early appearance, the readers of Lovecraft's stories began to explore libraries and museums for certain imaginary titles of Lovecraft's own creation, so powerful that many another writer, with Lovecraft's permission, availed himself of facets of the mythos for his own use. Bit by bit it grew, and finally its outlines became distinct, and it was given a name: the Cthulhu Mythology; because it was in "The Call of Cthulhu" that the myth-pattern first became apparent. It is possible to trace the original inception of this mythology back through Robert W. Chambers' little-known "The King in Yellow" to Poe's Narrative of A. Gordon Pym and Bierce's "An Inhabitant of Carcosa"; but in these stories only the barest hints of something outside had appeared, and it was Lovecraft who constructed the myth-pattern in its final form. In his stories he merged fantasy with

terror, and even his poetry took on certain symbols of the mythos, so that presently he was writing: "... all my stories, unconnected as they may be, are based on the fundamental lore or legend that this world was inhabited at one time by another race who, in practising black magic, lost their foothold and were expelled, yet live on outside ever ready to take possession of this earth again ...", a formula remarkable for the fact that, though it sprang from the mind of a professed religious unbeliever, it is basically similar to the Christian mythos, particularly in regard to the expulsion of Satan from Eden and the power of evil. (p. 88)

This extract is interesting for several reasons. In the first place, Derleth clearly shows how he misunderstood the nature of Lovecraft's pseudo-mythology, particularly in his identification of Poe, Chambers and Bierce as key figures in the formulation of the "Mythos". Lovecraft admitted that he picked up his theogony from Machen and Dunsany. When he said he "slings this stuff" as Chambers did, he surely was referring to the way Chambers dropped names in stories.

In addition, Derleth's article, written c. April 1937, contains what is probably a spurious quote attributed to Lovecraft and apparently fabricated (without intention to deceive) by Harold S. Farnese. In a letter to Derleth dated 11 April 1937 (ms., State Historical Society of Wisconsin), Farnese attributed to Lovecraft the famous "Black Magic" quotation. Derleth immediately latched on to the quote and used it at every opportunity to describe what he believed was the essence of Lovecraft's work, for he believed it to be in Lovecraft's own words. Unless we find Lovecraft's letters to Farnese, we will never know if Lovecraft ever wrote such an unseemly description of his work. However, it seems that Farnese may have had a penchant for quoting from memory, as when he told Donald Wandrei that Lovecraft was a major contributor to *Weird Tales* along with a writer he called "Bell-knap Jones", surely thinking of Frank Belknap Long. Dirk W. Mosig, in his article "H. P. Lovecraft: Myth-Maker", quotes from several of Farnese's letters to Lovecraft, and those letters show that it may have been Farnese who saw Lovecraft's work as being concerned with black magic. Lovecraft's replies to Farnese's quotations (SL IV.69-71) provide information that is more nearly in keeping with the actual content and objectives of his stories, and it is noteworthy that he does not mention "black magic" as a typical subject. Thus, Farnese innocently contributed to the birth of the "Cthulhu Mythos" as espoused by August Derleth.

In the face of a rather timid objection from Clark Ashton Smith, Derleth maintained that the Lovecraft mythology was remarkable because it resembled the "Christian mythos". This is remarkable only because there is no evidence whatsoever that Lovecraft founded his mythology with its "pantheon" of gods as a parallel to the monotheistic Christian religion, and also because, as Smith said, there is no reference to "expulsion" of Cthulhu in "The Call of Cthulhu". Even more remarkable is the fact that it occurred to Derleth to interpret the mythology in this way and that this interpretation went unchallenged for many years.

The "Cthulhu Mythos" as Derleth perceived it is, at best, an artificial, rigid grouping of Lovecraft's stories based upon a misinterpretation by



someone not attuned to Lovecraft's philosophical outlook. In the nearly fifty years that the term has been in existence, there has been no consensus as to what stories are part of the "Mythos", nor has there been a clear idea of why some stories should belong to it and others should not, especially in the case of the work of Lovecraft himself. To become ensnared in Derleth's and Farnese's terminology and interpretation (later augmented by Francis T. Laney's "gods of water, of fire, of air, and of earth" which Derleth called "elementals") is to allow Lovecraft's expansive cosmic vision to become narrow and clouded. Lovecraft's stories were founded on his own philosophical outlook, whereas Derleth's interpretation is founded on his. For instance, Lovecraft was an atheist and Derleth was a Roman Catholic, and both had distinctly opposed philosophical points of view.

Let us take, for example, a letter from August Derleth to Robert Barlow dated 15 June 1934. In that letter, written three years before Lovecraft's death (indeed, Lovecraft may have seen the letter, for he was visiting Barlow in Florida at the time), Derleth wrote of his own stories using Lovecraft's mythological entities, and of his conception of what Lovecraft's mythology was about:

According to the mythology as I understand it, it is briefly this: the Ancient or Old Ones ruled the universe—from their authority revolted the evil Cthulhu, Hastur the Unspeakable, etc., who in turn spawned the Tcho-Tcho people and other cultlike creatures. The Star-Warriors are the condottieri of the Ancient Ones. Though your drawing is okeh, I personally had pictured the Star-Warriors as very human-like, save for an exalted and strikign head. Besides all this, they shone, as from some great inner light. However, H. P. is the final court of appeal in all these matters. Of all my pieces, only THE THING THAT WALKED ON THE WIND is worth-while adding to the mythology. (Ms., State Historical Society of Wisconsin)

Derleth's feeble understanding of Lovecraft's stories written to that time is difficult to conceive. The alienness of his creatures was sheer genius in that they bore no resemblance to human beings or anything of this earth; yet Derleth envisioned the Star-Warriors as being "human-like". It was Derleth who called Hastur "the Unspeakable". Indeed, Lovecraft mentioned Hastur only twice in a single story, "The Whisperer in Darkness" (1930), but it was Derleth who became obsessed with Hastur, using the creature as the focus of Lovecraft's pseudomythology for a time. (Lovecraft's letters of reply to Derleth from the summer of 1931 make repeated reference to "Hastur figures", obviously Derleth's term.) Lovecraft never indicated what significance Hastur had, if any. Robert W. Chambers, from whom Lovecraft borrowed Hastur, is equally vague in his mention of Hastur (if anything, Hastur is a place in Chambers; note the phrase "When from Carcosa, the Hyades, Hastur, and Aldebaran . . ." in the story "The Repairer of Reputations" from *The King in Yellow*), and Ambrose Bierce, who conceived of Hastur in his "Haÿta the Shepherd", referred to Hastur only as "the god of shepherds"—surely a pastoral sort of god. (But see Lovecraft's reference to "the accursed cult of Hastur" in his description of Chambers's "The Yellow Sign" in *Supernatural Horror in Literature* [1925-27] and the cult of evil men in "The Whisperer in Darkness".) As Lovecraft pointed out repeatedly, Cthulhu is not evil.

Smith reminded Derleth of this, but Derleth ignored him. Cthulhu's intentions regarding human beings are not evil, for evil is a human conception. We attribute evil as a motive to Cthulhu's actions because of his sheer alienness and because of his utter disregard for humanity, but we could not call Cthulhu intrinsically evil. Lovecraft mentioned Derleth's "Tcho-Tchos" only in passing in "The Horror in the Museum" (1933) and "The Shadow out of Time" (1934-35), so whatever Derleth meant in his letter cannot be attributed to anything Lovecraft wrote but only to Derleth's conception of his own creations. Whether Derleth ever went to the "final court of appeal in all these matters" is not known, but it would seem he did not. In fact, following Lovecraft's death, Derleth himself assumed that role, even to the extent of informing would-be "Mythos" writers that the Mythos was protected by copyright and that only with infrequently given permission could someone be allowed to write a Mythos story.

Since Derleth exhibited a poor understanding of Lovecraft's work, we should not have to defend what Lovecraft wrote on Derleth's terms. Defending an idea conceived by August Derleth on Lovecraft's behalf would be counterproductive. Such action would be akin to arguing about the interpretation of passages from the Bible on the basis of their interpretation into modern English. If we wanted to know what the writers of antiquity meant in any particular book in the Bible, we would first of all have to be familiar with their own language and the audience for whom the book was written. So too is the case with Lovecraft. We should focus our attention on his writings as he himself wrote them and explained them. This is not to say that others may not be helpful in our understanding of Lovecraft and his work. Interpretation by learned scholars can be of great value. However, we must always keep the original in view and not deviate far from it.

If we examine Derleth's "Mythos" stories (of which he wrote more than thirty), we see that he has interpreted very broadly Lovecraft's invitation to make allusions to his background material. The reason for this is that Derleth read what he wanted into Lovecraft's invitation, as seen in the following passage:

Lovecraft began to write these stories without any overall plan; it is doubtful that he had even conceived the Cthulhu Mythos as it finally evolved when he began writing such tales as "The Nameless City" and "The Call of Cthulhu." When at last he began consciously to construct the pantheon, he invited some of his fellow writers to add to it, with the result that Clark Ashton Smith added Tsathoggua and Atlach-Nacha, Frank Belknap Long the Hounds of Tindalos and Chaugnar Faugn, Henry Kuttner Nyogtha, and I myself added Cthugha, corresponding to the fire elemental Lovecraft failed to provide, as well as Lloigor, Zhar, the Tcho-Tcho people, Ithaqua, etc. Lovecraft added Hypnos, god of sleep; Dagon, ruler of the Deep Ones, ocean depth allies of Cthulhu; Yig, the prototype of Quetzalcoatl; the "Abominable Snow-Men of Mi-Go," etc.<sup>3</sup>

This statement is so full of inaccuracies as to make one wonder how ignorant of Lovecraft and his work his self-proclaimed disciple could have been. As seen above, the mythology was probably intentionally unstructured. Smith told Derleth that Hypnos was the god of sleep in Greek mythology, not a Lovecraftian invention, but Derleth ignored him. Dagon and the Mi-Go are

3. "Introduction" to The Dunwich Horror and Others (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1963), pp. xiv-xv.

likewise founded in real mythos. It is a lie to say that Lovecraft "invited some of his fellow writers to add to" the Mythos as an end in itself. Derleth's statement implies that only a certain privileged few—he among them—were allowed to contribute.

As we know, Lovecraft primarily borrowed terms—and only terms—from other writers, and he invited nearly anyone who wished freely to make allusions to things mentioned in his stories. He continually urged writers to develop their own ideas in their own milieux, but he never urged them to write about what was essentially his unique vision. No great artist tries to make other artists use the products of his vision in their works. What Lovecraft did was urge writers to make glancing references to his own or Smith's or Howard's myth-creations, merely to magnify the expansiveness of what they may have been writing about. Surely *urge* is too strong a word to use to describe this phenomenon. It might better be said that Lovecraft was amused by such references; he did not direct any campaign to extend his pseudomythology, as Derleth seems to have believed when he wrote in 1943 that "I am at last heeding his [Lovecraft's] admonition to develop the vein he opened" (*Weird Tales*, March 1944, p. 104). This statement is Derleth's rather arrogant interpretation of Lovecraft's letter to him of 3 August 1931.

Derleth remained incredibly ignorant of how various names were assimilated into Lovecraft's stories. Clark Ashton Smith did not "add" Tsathoggua to Lovecraft's myth-pattern. Lovecraft made allusions to Tsathoggua in his work; Smith did not actively add anything. Derleth knew this because it was explained to him by both Lovecraft and Smith. Lovecraft read Smith's "The Tale of Satampra Zeiros" in December 1929 and was so impressed by the story, which he thought was going to be printed soon in *Weird Tales*, that he made a nodding reference to Tsathoggua in "The Mound" and "The Whisperer in Darkness". Smith's story was rejected, so Lovecraft's reference to Tsathoggua actually appeared in print before Smith's. Even so, Lovecraft did not "adopt" Smith's creation, he merely referred to it. In the same way, Frank Belknap Long did not "add" the hounds of Tindalos to Lovecraft's pseudomythology, nor did Lovecraft adopt them—he merely referred to them in "The Whisperer in Darkness".

Derleth himself made numerous intentional contributions to the Lovecraft canon, for his Lloigor, Cthugha, Ithaqua, Tcho-Tcho people, and others are all found in stories that do not reflect any mode of fictional expression natural to Derleth. They are found in what can only be called Lovecraft pastiches. Although Lovecraft did not encourage writers to contribute to his mythology, neither did he discourage writers like Derleth from making overt use of his ideas. Following Lovecraft's death, Derleth made continued use of Lovecraft's material, while other so-called Mythos writers ceased. After all, the exercise of making references to each other's stories was something of an inside joke, and with Lovecraft gone, there was little fun in continuing the game. Derleth himself perversely had little regard for his numerous "Mythos" stories. He continually said they were entertainments not worth the effort to read more than once. Nevertheless, Derleth regularly wrote new Mythos stories because they sold easily, especially when he shared a byline with the deceased Lovecraft.

As shown above, the pseudomythological elements to which Lovecraft referred were only part of the fictional background of his stories. They were never the subject of his stories, but rather part of the background against which the main action occurred. That is to say, Lovecraft did not write about Cthulhu, Yog-Sothoth, the *Necronomicon*, or any of the other places or creatures or books found in his stories. The subject of his stories was typically the small place that man occupies in an uncaring cosmos, and his fictional creations were only part of the means by which he sought to demonstrate that.

For instance, "The Shadow out of Time" is not strictly about the Great Race (or any of the elements from Lovecraft stories alluded to within it), although their history forms a large and significant part of the story. The story is about Nathaniel Wingate Peaslee's breakdown in his conception of reality and his place in it; and therefore, of necessity, our place in the universe. Lovecraft is saying that we tend to look at the world and ourselves in a very narrow way. If we looked beyond ourselves—or, as in this story, if we are forced to look beyond—we may not be able to comprehend or bear the significance of what really exists. The horror in the story is that Peaslee is not in total control of his life; everything he knew prior to his realization that the Great Race once occupied a significant though unknown part of our past has been shattered. Worse still, we find we are actually more akin to the Great Race than we might suspect; especially because we both have reason to fear the unknown elder race hinted at in the story.

Likewise, *At the Mountains of Madness* (1931)—Lovecraft's version of a "dinosaur egg" story—is an analysis of the reaction of a group of men to the discovery of an ancient, alien race that predates humanity and that once occupied the earth. There has been no record of their existence, save strange allusions in a book not taken very seriously. The men discover the book was correct, and to their horror they discover that the ancient race was not entirely dead; they themselves are responsible for freeing the Old Ones from their icy prison. The focus of the story is Prof. Dyer's musings about the significance of their discovery. It would have a startling effect on our thoughts regarding our place in the history of this planet.

In other words, Lovecraft's stories are about people, not exotic monsters from strange places. His stories address how we might be affected by knowledge of such things, but they are not about those things. The unfortunate fact is that the majority of Lovecraft's imitators, under the tutelage of August Derleth, have tended to write only about the monsters.

By May 1937 August Derleth had seen only about half of the stories he later referred to as Lovecraft's "Mythos" stories. It was Derleth who, on the basis of only a very sketchy background, felt that Lovecraft needed to name and organize the mythology about which Lovecraft had written only occasionally. Whereas Lovecraft was essentially indifferent to his pseudo-mythology, Derleth was quite obsessed with it. With the proliferation of more and more Mythos stories by writers in amateur publications, the term

"Cthulhu Mythos", an ill-conceived expression from the beginning, has acquired a pejorative connotation. Lovecraft scholars have tried to avoid this by using the term "Lovecraft Mythos", but too many people still associate the substitute term with what August Derleth originally meant by "Cthulhu Mythos". My suggestion to dispense with reference to a "Cthulhu Mythos" is not new by any means. Richard L. Tierney and Dirk W. Mosig have both suggested abandoning the term as being inappropriate in the discussion of Lovecraft's works, but their suggestions have been ignored largely because they have been misunderstood and because they appeared merely to have supplanted the offending term with another one to no particular advantage.

Tierney's article, "The Derleth Mythos", was one of the early attempts to address Derleth's lack of understanding of Lovecraft's work. By referring to a "Derleth Mythos", Tierney was somewhat sarcastically saying that the "Mythos" was nothing more than Derleth's incorrect and earthbound interpretation of Lovecraft's cosmic vision. In exposing the Mythos for what it was, Tierney tried to convince us to look back to Lovecraft's words to determine what he actually wrote about and to ignore Derleth's mistaken and authoritarian interpretations. It seems Tierney preferred we not use the term "Cthulhu Mythos" because it conjured up Derleth's mistaken interpretation of Lovecraft's work, as well as the growing body of second-rate fiction based on that interpretation as well. However, many misunderstood Tierney's intent, and even now we see professed distinctions being made between a "Derleth Mythos" and a "Cthulhu Mythos" when Tierney had indicated that they were one and the same.<sup>4</sup>

Dirk W. Mosig, inspired in part by Tierney's essay, went on to explore the shortcomings of the ongoing misinterpretation of Lovecraft's pseudo-mythology. Derleth had the annoying habit of describing the "mythos" in terms of the stories that "belonged" to it. Thus, what Lovecraft wrote about and the vehicles in which he discussed it were being referred to by the same vague term. In an attempt to eradicate the inaccurate and vague term "Cthulhu Mythos", Mosig encouraged Lovecraft scholars to adopt the term "Yog-Sothoth Cycle of Myth" as a way to refer to the myth cycle itself, with its attendant creatures and books and places, much as we would use the expression "Greek mythology" to embrace the legends of the Greek gods and heroes. Any works that mention characters, places or artifacts from Greek mythology, such as the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* of Homer, would not be referred to as the "Greek Mythos". It would be equally inappropriate to say that the "Cthulhu Mythos" consists of "The Call of Cthulhu", "The Dunwich Horror", and so on. Unfortunately, nearly everyone (this writer included) construed the term "Yog-Sothoth Cycle of Myth" to be a mere substitute for the term "Cthulhu Mythos", and so the term never was accepted because of its cumbersome and because of the comfortable familiarity of Derleth's term.

If we simply abandon the term "Cthulhu Mythos", where might we turn for ways to describe the content of Lovecraft's stories? Let us examine

---

4. Cf. Robert M. Price, "H. P. Lovecraft and the Cthulhu Mythos", *Crypt of Cthulhu*, No. 35 (Hallowmass 1985) 3-11.

a few key descriptions written by Lovecraft himself that can give us a foundation on which to base study of his writings. One is from his now-famous letter to Farnsworth Wright which accompanied the second submittal of "The Call of Cthulhu" for publication in *Weird Tales*:

All my tales are based on the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the cosmos-at-large. To me there is nothing but puerility in a tale in which the human form—and the local human passions and conditions and standards—are depicted as native to other worlds or other universes. To achieve the essence of real externality, whether of time or space or dimension, one must forget that such things as organic life, good and evil, love and hate, and all such local attributes of a negligible and temporary race called mankind, have any existence at all. Only the human scenes and characters must have human qualities. These must be handled with unsparing realism, (not catch-penny romanticism) but when we cross the line to the boundless and hideous unknown—the shadow-haunted Outside—we must remember to leave our humanity and terrestrialism at the threshold. (SL II.150)

Another is from his "Biographical Notice" of 1928:

[My] serious literary efforts [are] now confined to tales of dream-life, strange shadow, and cosmic "outsideness", notwithstanding sceptical rationalism of outlook and keen regard for the sciences. (Uncollected Prose and Poetry I.44)

These two quotations provide ample basis for the study of Lovecraft's work. Any discerning reader can see that these statements apply to nearly all of Lovecraft's works, and so can be considered genuine expressions of Lovecraft's intent in his fiction. It is telling that Lovecraft does not say that his literary efforts are confined to attempts to create a new mythology, since nearly every story written after 1928 is considered by Mythos enthusiasts to be a "Mythos" story. It may amaze some readers to learn that Derleth used both of the quotations above in essays about Lovecraft right beside the familiar "Black Magic" quote and Derleth's own typical Mythos descriptions, even though it is clear that those viewpoints are incompatible.

Derleth's unflinching forty-year campaign for a "Cthulhu Mythos" has had far-reaching consequences. In reference books Lovecraft is invariably dubbed the inventor of the Cthulhu Mythos; what Derleth called Lovecraft's "crowning achievement". Lovecraft deserves better recognition than that. Derleth may have thought he was doing Lovecraft the dubious favor of assigning a name to and structuralizing (and even completing) what he erroneously assumed to be the most significant aspect of Lovecraft's work, and then stepping aside to let Lovecraft bask in the glory of the recognition of his creation. This action has done more harm than good. Lovecraft's stories offer much more than exotic extraterrestrials and occult books. They challenge us to consider the world in which we live in light of what science has told us about it. To wrestle with ambiguous, or downright incorrect, terms and concepts foisted upon Lovecraft by a well-meaning but misguided admirer of his work is to waste our time and to allow ourselves to be distracted from the grander vistas opened to us in Lovecraft's stories. Let us lay the unwieldy "Mythos" aside and go directly to Lovecraft's works if we mean to behold the scenes he envisioned.

# In Search of Arkham Country

by Will Murray

**A**lthough a lifelong resident of Providence, Rhode Island, H. P. Lovecraft's imagination was captured by the brooding state to the north of his natal city, Massachusetts. As a lad he often made bicycle trips to rustic Massachusetts locales like Great Meadow Hill in Taunton. Of this attraction Lovecraft once wrote:

... As for New England as a seat of weirdness—a little historical reflection will shew why it is more naturally redolent of the Bizarre & the sinister than any other part of America. It was here that the most gloomy-minded of all the colonists settled; & here that the dark woods & cryptic hills pressed closest. An abnormal Puritan psychology led to all kinds of repression, furtiveness, & grotesque hidden crime, while the long winters & backwoods isolation fostered monstrous secrets which never came to light. To me there is nothing more fraught with mystery & terror than a remote Massachusetts farmhouse against a lonely hill. Where else could an outbreak like the Salem witchcraft have occurred? Rhode Island does not share these tendencies—its history & settlement being different from those of other parts of New England—but just across the line in the old Bay State the macabre broods at its strongest. (SL III.423)

Lovecraft's most famous fictional creations were the non-existent Massachusetts towns of Dunwich, Innsmouth, Kingsport, and the most famous and important of them all, "witch-haunted Arkham". Arkham was the first of Lovecraft's fictitious cities, the one most often mentioned in his tales, and the one, of course, which August Derleth took as his inspiration when he named the fledgling publishing company he created in 1939 to perpetuate Lovecraft's writings—Arkham House.

Scholars have long been serene in their belief that Arkham was inspired by, modelled after, and occupies the same geographical position on Massachusetts' North Shore as Salem, the supposed site of the Puritan witch-trials. And with good reason. Lovecraft himself suggested this belief in letters to fellow writers:

About "Arkham" & "Kingsport"—bless my soul! but I thought I'd told you all about them years ago! They are typical but imaginary places—like the river "Miskatonic", whose name is simply a jumble of Algonquin roots. Vaguely, "Arkham" corresponds to Salem (though Salem has no college), while "Kingsport" corresponds to Marblehead. Similarly, there is no "Dunwich"—the place being a vague echo of the decadent Massachusetts countryside around Springfield—say, Wilbraham, Monson, and Hampden. (SL III.432)

This passage, chronologically the first one printed in Lovecraft's *Selected*

---

1. It is more than just that. See my forthcoming *Crypt of Cthulhu* article, "Roots of the Miskatonic", for the true derivation and meaning of the term "Miskatonic".

2. But it does now—Salem State College.

Letters to make the Arkham/Salem connection, was written at the same time Lovecraft was beginning, or was about to begin, "The Shadow over Innsmouth". Innsmouth, another fictitious place, is several miles up the coast from Arkham, according to that story's narrator, who boards a bus in Newburyport for his native Arkham, which is clearly south of Newburyport, in Essex County. Salem is south of Newburyport, both of which reside in Essex County.

In another letter Lovecraft reiterates this information: "My fabulous 'Kingsport' is a sort of idealised version of Marblehead, Mass.—while my 'Arkham' is more or less derived from Salem—though Salem has no college. 'Innsmouth' is a considerably twisted version of Newburyport, Mass." (SL V.85-86).

This would seem to establish the true locations of Arkham, Kingsport, and Innsmouth beyond reasonable doubt. But in fact it does not. Note that Lovecraft took especial pains to qualify his statements with phrases like "vaguely", "distortion of", and the like.

In actual fact, none of these towns are as closely patterned after their supposed originals as Lovecraft's words seem to suggest. In fact, neither are they located where scholars have long placed them. This is self-evident in "The Shadow over Innsmouth". If Innsmouth were really simply a disguised Newburyport, then the narrator of that story could not possibly board a bus in Newburyport to travel south to Innsmouth. Obviously, Innsmouth is located in a different point along the Massachusetts coast.

For that matter, Arkham is not even remotely where it has been long believed to be. Lovecraft's comments aside, his letter to Derleth and the novelette written in 1931 only establish where Arkham sat in 1931. In reality, the true seat of Arkham was established and reiterated many times in Lovecraft's earliest fiction as being, not on the Massachusetts North Shore, but many miles inland in a remote, haunted rural area. Some Lovecraft scholars have been puzzled by the seeming proximity of Arkham to the central Massachusetts town of Dunwich in "The Dunwich Horror", but, swayed by Lovecraft's very specific linking of Arkham and Salem elsewhere, chose to turn a blind eye to that apparent anomaly.

This article will attempt to prove, to paraphrase an old radio humor show, that everything you know about Lovecraft's Massachusetts is wrong.

Arkham, Massachusetts, was first mentioned in Lovecraft's 1920 short story, "The Picture in the House". Therein, the narrator speaks of "travelling for some time amongst the people of the Miskatonic Valley in quest of certain genealogical data",<sup>3</sup> and of getting lost on the way home to Arkham. The Miskatonic Valley would seem to be based upon the Connecticut River Valley, which is in central Massachusetts, many, many miles inland from coastal Salem. Inasmuch as the opening paragraph specifically sets the location of the story as among "the ancient, lonely farmhouses of backwoods New England" (DH 116), it should be clear to any thoughtful reader that the Arkham in question cannot possibly be Salem. A further bit of

---

3. Lovecraft, *The Dunwich Horror and Others* (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1984), p. 117. Hereinafter cited in the text as DH. For the location of all the Massachusetts sites mentioned in this article, consult the map on pp. 60-61.



evidence, the mention of a "Salem merchantman" (DH 121), would argue that Salem and Arkham are two distinctly different cities, otherwise the phrase would have been "Arkham merchantman".

"Herbert West—Reanimator" carries this idea forward. In the opening paragraph, that story's narrator speaks, for the first time, of the Miskatonic University Medical School in Arkham. The suggestion here is that the university must be named for the nearby Miskatonic River, which, if it is like its counterpart, the Connecticut River, runs north-south through central Massachusetts and is nowhere near Salem. The Arkham in this story appears to be in a farming community. There are several mentions of deserted farmhouses and nowhere any suggestion of Arkham being a fishing or coastal town.

Most telling, perhaps, are the references to the town of Bolton, Massachusetts. Lovecraft describes it as "a factory town near Arkham",<sup>4</sup> and he adds that "the Bolton Worsted Mills are the largest in the Miskatonic Valley" (D 133). There is a Bolton in Massachusetts, a factory town just as Lovecraft claims. But it is easily 40 or so miles west of Arkham—not near Salem by any stretch of the imagination.

However, Bolton is not anywhere near the Connecticut River Valley. But as we will see, Lovecraft's Miskatonic River does not precisely correspond geographically to the Connecticut.

There is also a brief mention of the town of Sefton, which houses an asylum. There is no town by that name in Massachusetts, but there is a Grafton just 18 miles due south of Bolton. It was a common Lovecraftian device to modify real localities by a letter or two in order to create a quasi-fictitious place. In "The Rats in the Walls" Lovecraft turned the English town of Ancaster into "Anchester" in exactly that way. For that matter, Exham Priory, mentioned in that story, is apparently based upon the British town of Hexham.<sup>5</sup> If Sefton is Grafton with just a few letters modified, then we begin to establish the general vicinity of Arkham: central Massachusetts.

"The Unnamable", written in 1923, is the next story set in Arkham. It does not provide any specific clues as to Arkham's location, but a close reading of the story again suggests a rural farming community, far from the sea. This is the first of Lovecraft's stories to suggest a Salem connection. It is done by inference only. Arkham is described as a "witch-haunted old town" (D 197)—a characterization that will later become emblematic.

Arkham is mentioned in passing in the next chronological story, "The Festival" (1923). Although the tale is set in Kingsport, Lovecraft's "idealised" Marblehead, the narrator writes, at the conclusion of his Kingsport experience:

When I went delirious at hearing that the hospital stood near the old church-yard on Central Hill, they sent me to St. Mary's Hospital in Arkham, where I could

4. Lovecraft, *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales* (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1965), p. 133. Hereafter cited in the text as D.

5. Hexham is also mentioned in *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* (At the Mountains of Madness and Other Novels) [Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1985], p. 220; hereinafter cited in the text as *RW*). The resonances between the names Hexham and Arkham are interesting, but probably without meaning.

have better care. I liked it there, for the doctors were broad-minded, and even lent me their influence in obtaining the carefully sheltered copy of *Alhazred's Necronomicon* from the library of Miskatonic University. (D 194)

This reference appears problematical. It seems to imply that Arkham is near Kingsport, which in reality it would be if Arkham were truly Salem and Kingsport, Marblehead. But it is not absolutely conclusive. Lovecraft may have had his character hospitalized in Arkham as a literary license to give him access to the rare *Necronomicon*.

Arkham is not mentioned again by Lovecraft for three years, and then in "The Silver Key", "The Strange High House in the Mist", and *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, all of which were begun in the fall of 1926. The several paragraphs of evocation of various New England towns in the *Dream-Quest* mentions that "Arkham is there, with its moss-grown gambrel roofs and the rocky rolling meadows behind it" (MM 401), but it does not clarify its location. It is worth noting that both Marblehead and Kingsport are listed here, arguing that they, too, are not identical places.

In "The Silver Key" Arkham is once more called "the terrible, witch-haunted old town" (MM 413). However, there are several other references to Salem, which again suggests that Arkham and Salem coexist. Arkham is also described as "haunted" (MM 415), and there is mention of "the rushing Miskatonic [where] the lonely rustic homestead of his people lay" (MM 415), which again points to a rural setting. But there is also the suggestion that Kingsport is nearby: ". . . with the distant spires of Kingsport on the horizon, and hints of the archaic, dream-laden sea in the farthest background" (MM 415). Inasmuch as Carter can read the clock on Kingsport steeple with a telescope, they cannot be very many miles apart.

In "The Strange High House in the Mist" Arkham's proximity to Kingsport is reinforced in the following passage:

Now north of archaic Kingsport the crags climb lofty and curious, terrace on terrace, till the northernmost hangs in the sky like a grey frozen wind-cloud. Alone it is, a bleak point jutting in limitless space, for there the coast turns sharp where the great Miskatonic pours out of the plains past Arkham, bringing woodland legends and little quaint memories of New England's hills. (D 260)

But later Lovecraft mentions that Arkham is inland and toward the west, although not far from Kingsport.

It would seem then that with these last two or three stories Arkham has been relocated to, or near, the sea. But it isn't that simple.

"West of Arkham the hills rise wild, and there are dark valleys with deep woods that no axe has ever cut" (DH 53), is the famous opening line of "The Colour out of Space". Perhaps Lovecraft's most haunting rustic story, it is definitely set in central Massachusetts. Yet throughout the story, professors from the Miskatonic University and reporters of the *Arkham Gazette* descend upon the fallen meteor, implying that Arkham is quite close to the story's locale. Reporters also come from Boston, but that is natural because Boston newspapers are distributed throughout the state. But it must be noted that geographically the area where this story is set is

many miles distant from Salem. Reporters from provincial Salem would hardly venture into central Massachusetts. For that matter, Harvard University in Cambridge is closer to this area than is Salem, the purported seat of Miskatonic University. In this story Arkham is obviously a nearby town.

Now this setting is, in fact, west of Salem. But it is about 50 miles west of Salem—even less close to Salem than Bolton. Thus, in this story, Arkham cannot possibly be Salem. Too many characters are described as trudging from this area to Arkham, and Lovecraft makes clear that the area was later inundated by "the new reservoir" (DH 54) which could only be the man-made Quabbin Reservoir; this is, in fact, just west of the rough geographic area where Bolton and Grafton are to be found. Thus, we have the opposite boundary of what in this story Lovecraft calls "Arkham country" (DH 80).

"The Dunwich Horror", written only months later, contains the final proof. It is set in a rural locale around Dunwich, described as in "north central Massachusetts" (DH 155), in the "Miskatonic's upper reaches" (DH 156), close to Round Mountain and the mythical city of Aylesbury. But the Wilbraham area Lovecraft claimed was the model for Dunwich is in fact in south central Massachusetts, south of the Quabbin Reservoir and west of Grafton.

In this story, as with "The Colour out of Space", Arkham is geographically near the story's locale. Again, the odd doings in Dunwich were of concern to the Boston Globe and the Arkham Advertiser. Such doings would certainly have been picked up by Boston's major newspaper, but Arkham, if it were Salem, is too ridiculously distant and provincial to bother reporting on Dunwich happenings. Further, the real Salem is once again mentioned by name. Equally telling is the reference to Wilbur Whateley's quest for the *Necronomicon*. Lovecraft writes:

The following winter brought an event no less strange than Wilbur's first trip outside the Dunwich region. Correspondence with the Widener Library at Harvard, the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, the British Museum, the University of Buenos Ayres, and the Library of Miskatonic University of Arkham had failed to get him the loan of a book he desperately wanted; so at length he set out in person . . . to consult the copy at Miskatonic, which was the nearest to him geographically. (DH 169)

Again, Harvard's Widener Library is considerably closer to the imagined Dunwich area than is Salem.

Later in the story it is mentioned that Dr. Armitage sets out by car from Arkham and arrives at Dunwich Village at one in the afternoon. This suggests that the two towns are at least two hours apart by car. Allowing for difficult backwoods roads, they may not be terribly far apart as the crow flies.

But where is Dunwich? In a letter to James F. Morton, dated June 1928, Lovecraft wrote of this story that "The scene is the upper Miskatonic Valley—far, far west of Arkham" (SL II.240), echoing his "Colour out of Space" opening line and indicating that Dunwich is beyond the site of "Colour". Add to that the clue provided in "The Dunwich Horror"'s opening line: "When a traveller in north central Massachusetts takes the wrong fork at the

junction of the Aylesbury pike just beyond Dean's Corners he comes upon a lonely and curious country" (DH 155-56). This is the Dunwich area.

If we follow the example set by Sefton and Grafton, we should be looking for a name similar to Dunwich. In maps of the late 1920s there used to be a town in north central Massachusetts called Greenwich, also known as Greenwich Village, just as Dunwich is sometimes referred to by Lovecraft as Dunwich Village. According to maps of the day, if you were to travel west on the Worcester Turnpike, at one point you would be confronted by a junction at Enfield. If you took the wrong fork, it would lead north, directly to Greenwich!

The evidence appears conclusive. The true Arkham, then, is situated in central Massachusetts, east of Dunwich and the Quabbin Reservoir—and not very far east, at that.

But where?

If one takes a map of Massachusetts, and draws a line from the Wilbraham/Hampden area northward, through the Quabbin Reservoir, and connects it with a north central town (let's say Athol, because we know Lovecraft often visited his friend W. Paul Cook there), you would have one side of a rough rectangle in which Arkham might be found. A line running east connects Wilbraham to Grafton, the probable model for Sefton, and Grafton is connected with its northern neighbor, Bolton. Finally, a fourth line connecting Bolton to Athol in the west gives us an area of approximately 500 square miles in which Lovecraft's fictitious town of Arkham should be found.

In almost the exact center of this area, directly east of the Quabbin Reservoir, is the obscure town called Oakham.

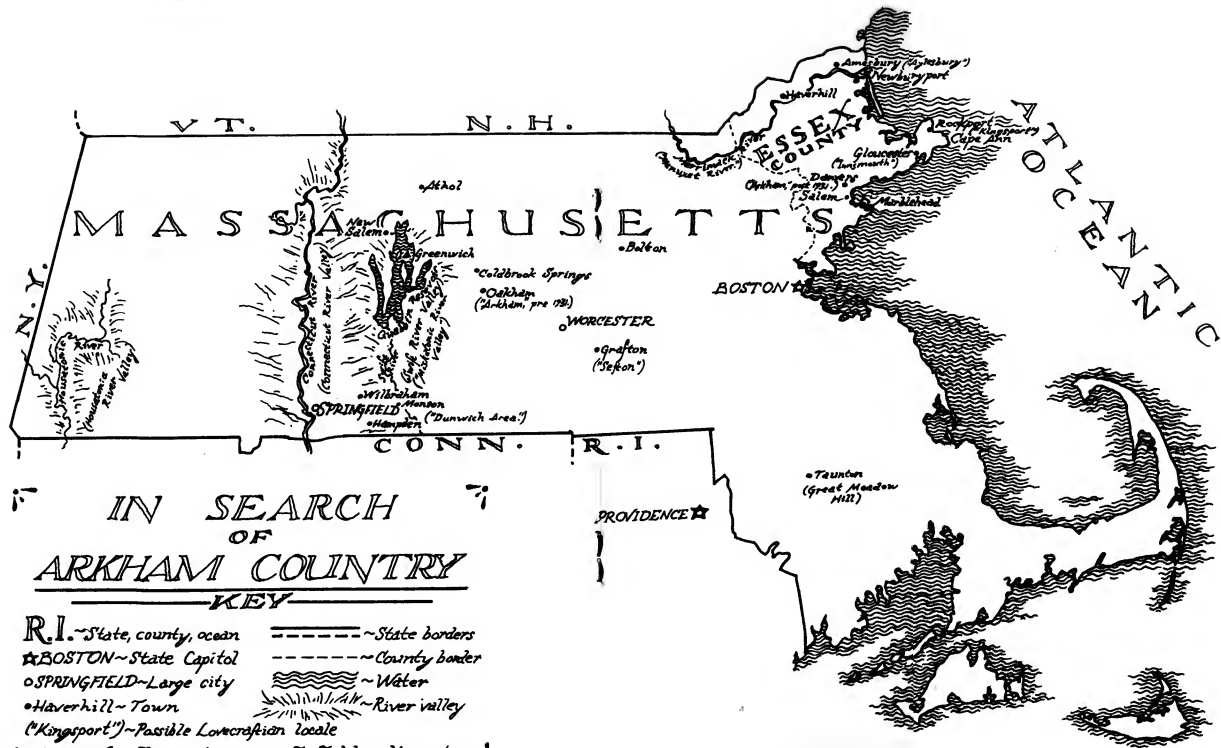
That's right. Oakham. Transpose the first two letters, change the O to an R, and you have . . . Arkham.

Oakham is remote. Even today no major roads go anywhere near it. Of course, Oakham has no college, and certainly no medical school. The only college near this place is the University of Massachusetts, on the other side of the Quabbin. There is a medical school, the University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester, only ten miles away from Oakham. Worcester is the only major city in this area, making it an excellent candidate for the real-life counterpart of Lovecraft's city of Aylesbury.

Was Oakham the inspiration for Arkham?

Only Lovecraft himself could answer that. But it appears conclusive that the original Arkham—especially as described in "The Colour out of Space"—could only be placed in or within mere miles of the real Oakham.

Now some readers might wish to dismiss the similarities between the name and location of Oakham and Lovecraft's Arkham as coincidental, arguing that Lovecraft never made any mention of Oakham in published letters or recorded conversations. True. But the clues in his fiction, when assembled, are compelling. Lovecraft may never have set foot in Oakham, but his travels in central Massachusetts are known to have included Athol to the north and Wilbraham to the south. His favorite mode of transportation was by rail. Oakham was served by the regional Massachusetts railroads in Lovecraft's day, specifically by the Boston & Maine line. It is entirely possible that Lovecraft passed through Oakham during one of his rail excursions.



! Greenwich ~ Former town J. Eckhardt, cart. !

sions, and if so, his powerful imagination, always sensitive to quaint places, might have been triggered by a glimpse of this isolated and half-forgotten hamlet.

But there is another piece of information that makes clear that Lovecraft was at least aware of this area via maps or oral accounts. For Oakham is located just four miles south of a place known as Coldbrook Springs.

If the name Coldbrook Springs rings a vague bell, one might recall that in "The Dunwich Horror" Lovecraft named an area near Dunwich—Cold Spring Glen! This is not likely to be a coincidence.

If Oakham is the original Arkham, what of the evidence in Lovecraft's letters and his fiction that it was based upon coastal Salem? Are they mutually exclusive?

One would think so. However, beginning with the sonnet-cycle *Fungi from Yuggoth* and continuing through the rest of Lovecraft's fiction, Lovecraft appears to have moved his Arkham.

This is a curious thing for him to do and may annoy purists, but again, the evidence for a coastal Arkham is as conclusive and overwhelming as it was in his pre-1929 stories for a backwoods Arkham.

In *Fungi from Yuggoth*, for example, Lovecraft writes:

Ten miles from Arkham I had struck the trail  
That rides the cliff-edge over Boynton Beach  
And hoped that just at sunset I could reach  
The crest that looks on Innsmouth in the vale.<sup>6</sup>

In "The Whisperer in Darkness" there are several references to Arkham being north of Boston, which is where it would be if it were Salem. In *At the Mountains of Madness* there is a brief mention of the Arkham Advertiser's wireless station on Kingsport Head, which places Arkham near Marblehead and Salem but is otherwise unspecific.

"The Shadow over Innsmouth" is more explicit, as related earlier. Lovecraft's story notes, reproduced in *Something about Cats*, shed more light. They state explicitly that the protagonist of that story must flee Innsmouth by going south "toward Arkham, which is nearer than Newburyport".<sup>7</sup>

"The Dreams in the Witch House" is very explicit. Arkham is said to be located in Essex County, where Salem is. Yet Salem is also mentioned in this story, indicating that it shares the same reality with, and is separate from, Arkham. Arkham also has salt marshes in this story, which indicates a coastal locale, and it is located south of Innsmouth. But Meadow Hill, a landmark of the Worcester County Arkham, is also mentioned. Clearly Lovecraft simply moved Arkham geographically. There do not exist two separate and distinct Arkhams in his fictional world. Otherwise, one might be called New Arkham, just as there is a New Salem located west of the Quabbin Reservoir.

The fact that Salem has a Witch House of its own—the museum where the early witchcraft inquests were held—and a Crowninshield House,<sup>8</sup> as well as

6. *Fungi from Yuggoth* (West Warwick, RI: Necronomicon Press, 1982), p. 5.

7. *Something about Cats and Other Pieces* (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1949), p. 172.

8. Oddly enough, there is a modern luxury apartment complex on the outskirts of modern

certain streets in common with Arkham, such as Derby Street, would appear to dispel any doubts.

"Through the Gates of the Silver Key", written in collaboration with E. Hoffmann Price, is less clear. There are no specific coastal references. The Arkham sections speak only of "the wild, haunted hills behind hoary and witch-haunted Arkham" (MM 422), which seem to suggest the rural Arkham of "The Colour out of Space". Lovecraft also wrote that "The region had been settled in 1692 by fugitives from the witchcraft trials in Salem" (MM 422), a statement that echoes what Lovecraft said of the inhabitants of Dunwich in "The Dunwich Horror": "The old gentry, representing the two or three armigerous families which came from Salem in 1692, have kept somewhat above the general level of decay" (DH 157).

But "The Thing on the Doorstep" practically draws the same map from Newburyport to Arkham that Lovecraft drew in "The Shadow over Innsmouth". This Arkham, by the way, has its own sanitarium, the Arkham Sanitarium. It would need it, of course, no longer being located near the Sefton Sanitarium.<sup>9</sup>

Lovecraft is consistent in these later stories that Arkham resides on the banks of the Miskatonic River and is the seat of Miskatonic University. These descriptions are congruent with Lovecraft's hand-drawn map of Arkham, reproduced in *Marginalia*.

Lovecraft's final Arkham-set story, "The Shadow out of Time", does not contradict this. It calls the town "crumbling, whisper-haunted Arkham" (DH 370), but makes no specific placement of the town except to mention in passing that the narrator, an Arkham inhabitant, hails from Haverhill. As it happens, Walter Gilman, the narrator of "The Dreams in the Witch House", is also a Haverhillite who came to Arkham to study at Miskatonic. This would seem to imply that Haverhill is convenient to Arkham—and in fact the real town of Haverhill is only about 20 miles northwest of Salem.<sup>10</sup>

Why would Lovecraft have moved his original version of Arkham, and with it the entire Miskatonic River?

There are several possible reasons. If one dissociates oneself from concerns of mundane geography, a strange pattern is noticed. Every time Lovecraft introduces a new fictitious city, its location is always tied in with Arkham, whether it is rural Dunwich or coastal Innsmouth.<sup>11</sup> It is as if Arkham is a phantom city, a spectral thing which hovers near all other seats of Massachusetts horror like some omnipresent malignant entity.

That is a romantic theory. But a more concrete one exists.

Although the Miskatonic River Valley is named, in part, after the Housatonic River Valley in western Massachusetts, and modeled after the

---

Oakham known as the Crowninshield Apartments. This may be a coincidence, although the name Crowninshield does not appear to be a common one in Massachusetts.

9. Regarding a real-life counterpart to the Arkham Sanitarium, Lovecraft mentions the Danvers Asylum in "The Shadow over Innsmouth" (DH 309) and "Pickman's Model" (DH 15).

10. In a letter to Helen V. Sully dated September 27, 1933, Lovecraft mentions that in Haverhill they call Newburyport "The City of the Living Dead" (SL IV.260).

11. I am indebted to S. T. Joshi for the observation that Lovecraft almost invariably mentioned Arkham whenever introducing a new mythical city, and for his immeasurable interest in, and help with, this article during its formative stages.

Connecticut River Valley in central Massachusetts, it appears to occupy the approximate geographical position of the Swift River Valley, whose main branch and tributaries were flooded in the late twenties and transformed by modern engineering into what is now known as the Quabbin Reservoir. In his "Observations on Several Parts of America" (1928) Lovecraft called it "that lovely Swift River Valley now doom'd to extinction for reservoir purposes."<sup>12</sup>

Imagine Lovecraft's chagrin, after he had built up his fictitious, unspoiled Miskatonic River Valley over several stories, upon learning that it was all about to become a man-made body of water. He had no choice but to move it!

The chronology seems to match. The Quabbin project began in 1926—no doubt after several years of planning and discussion. The first Lovecraft story to hint at a coastward shift of Arkham was "The Festival", written in 1923. Again, the reading of that story is problematical. Subsequent stories continue to suggest a backwoods locale. The coastal Arkham does not become firmly fixed until *At the Mountains of Madness*, written in 1931, well after the Quabbin project is underway. This is the same year Lovecraft's letters begin to reflect his assertion that Arkham is Salem. The reservoir was completed in 1939.

This might also explain why, other than a passing reference in the poem "The Ancient Track" (1929), the town of Dunwich is never again mentioned in Lovecraft. Its supposed real-life counterpart, Greenwich, was one of the towns obliterated to make way for the Quabbin Reservoir!

But Arkham is not exactly Salem. As pointed out earlier, Arkham and Salem continue to be cited separately in many later stories.

The second Arkham is actually Danvers, Massachusetts, the town where the Salem witchhunt really began. In those days it was not called Danvers, but Salem Village.<sup>13</sup> Present-day Danvers is north of Salem, separated only by the Danvers River—which, being the only river near Salem, must then be the latter-day Miskatonic River. But the Danvers River is nothing like the winding Miskatonic of Lovecraft's earliest stories, nor does it resemble the version that runs by Arkham in Lovecraft's hand-drawn map of Arkham.

There is a pattern to Lovecraft's treatment of New England place names. It might be called Idealization and Translocation. Lovecraft's strategy was to pick an evocative landscape or place, then rename and redefine it as a first step. Idealization took several forms. It is well known that many New England place names were really transplanted from England. Dunwich was the name of an unhappy British seacoast town which has been slowly eroded by the ocean's gnawing waves. Aylesbury is also a British locale, although it is equally possible that Lovecraft took the northeast Massachusetts town of Amesbury and subjected it to the same anagrammatical transformation which turned Oakham into the vaguely Biblical-sounding Arkham.<sup>14</sup>

12. Lovecraft, *Marginalia* (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1944), p. 252.

13. Lovecraft mentions this fact in *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* (MM 149) and in a letter to Frank Belknap Long and Alfred Galpin dated May 1, 1923, where he recounts a trip through that city (SL I.218).

14. Lovecraft mentions Amesbury in the letter to Helen V. Sully cited above.



Innsmouth and Kingsport are the only mythical Massachusetts towns which do not have British antecedents in real life. But in Lovecraft's early story "Celephaïs" he mentions a mythical Innsmouth located on the British coast. So the rule partially applies to one of these places.

The idealization goes beyond renaming. Each locale is improved. For example, Arkham's Meadow Hill apparently absorbed Great Meadow Hill, the Taunton landmark which Lovecraft loved to visit as a boy. Dunwich's Round Top is apparently a western Massachusetts hill, Round Mountain, moved east. Cold Spring Glen is the Bear's Den, a North New Salem landmark.<sup>15</sup>

As for Innsmouth and Kingsport, Lovecraft is very explicit about their locations, and neither occupies the same soil as their inspirations. In "The Shadow over Innsmouth" the narrator describes the bus trip from Newburyport to Innsmouth in clear language: "Out the window I could see the blue water and the sandy line of Plum Island, and we presently drew very near the beach as our narrow road veered off from the main highway to Rowley and Ipswich" (DH 315). On a modern map, this would mean that the bus followed the Atlantic coastline rather than taking Route 1A toward Salem. Following the coastal route, there is only one inescapable destination: a headland on which two ancient towns huddle. The narrator confirms this:

Then we reached the crest and beheld the outspread valley beyond, where the Manuxet joins the sea just north of the long line of cliffs that cluminate in Kingsport Head and veer off toward Cape Ann. On the far, misty horizon I could just make out the dizzy profile of the Head, topped by the queer ancient house of which so many legends are told; but for the moment all my attention was captured by the nearer panorama just below me. I had, I realised, come face to face with rumour-shadowed Innsmouth. (DH 315-16)

The Manuxet is a river of Lovecraft's invention, probably based on the Merrimack River, which runs through Newburyport, but was transplanted along with that town. Kingsport Head and the old house mentioned are clear references to "The Strange High House in the Mist", which is set in Kingsport. Obviously, then, Kingsport and Innsmouth adjoin one another.

Cape Ann, however, is a real place. It is at the tip of the quaint fishing village of Gloucester, which adjoins an equally quaint seaport town called Rockport. These two form a headland to which the bus route as described by the narrator would have had to come. The point Lovecraft calls Kingsport Head is obviously north of Cape Ann. There is an Andrews Point in Rockport, north of Cape Ann.

The inescapable conclusion is that Kingsport, although inspired by Marblehead, is really Rockport. And Innsmouth, although based upon Newburyport, is actually Gloucester. Lovecraft frequently visited both places. He called Rockport "a thing to dream about" (SL II.164). Gloucester was once described by him as "the last of the really unchanged New England fish-

---

15. According to Donald R. Burleson's "Humour beneath Horror" (*Lovecraft Studies*, 1, No. 2 [Spring 1980] 9). Although it is of interest to note that the "Snake Den", described in "Through the Gates of the Silver Key" as being near Arkham, also greatly resembles the Bear's Den.

ing ports" (SL II.166).<sup>16</sup> It is a fishing village set on a hill, whose physical layout is uncannily like Lovecraft's description of Innsmouth. Gloucester and Rockport are about twenty miles northeast of Salem and Danvers, which seems to fit the distance between Innsmouth and Arkham suggested in the passage cited earlier from *Fungi from Yuggoth*.

This complicated melding of towns, locales, and fantasy may seem to be a peculiar literary device, but it is not uncommon. As for Lovecraft's use of it, he explained and defended it in a letter to August Derleth, who had asked him if the rocky cliffs of Kingsport were based upon any real place. Lovecraft's answer clearly illustrates how and why he transformed real places into his mythical cities:

It would be impossible to make any real place the scene of such bizarre happenings as those which beset my hypothetical towns. At the same time, I take pains to make these places wholly and realistically characteristic of genuine New England seaports—always being authentic concerning architecture, atmosphere, dialect, manners and customs, &c. As for that rocky promontory—the coast north of Boston is composed of high rocky cliffs, which in several places rise to considerable altitudes as bold headlands. Of course, though, there is nothing as dizzy as the fabled seat of the Strange High House. If I had any promontory specifically in mind when writing that tale, it was the headland near Gloucester called "Mother Ann"—though that has no such relation to the city as my mysterious cliff has to "Kingsport". Marblehead has rocky cliffs—though of no great height—along the neck to the north of the ancient town. . . . (SL III.433)

In another letter Lovecraft said the following about the inspiration for those cliffs: "I ended up with the titan cliffs of Magnolia—memories of which prompted *The Strange High House in the Mist*—and found their charm undiminished. You can't imagine their majesty unless you've seen them—primal rock and sea and sky . . . and the bells of the buoys tolling free in the aether of faery!" (SL II.164).

The cliffs of Magnolia are actually in Rockport—which again emphasizes that Rockport is the physical locale of Kingsport, except in certain stories, like "The Silver Key", where Lovecraft actually sets Kingsport in Marblehead, rather than moving Marblehead to Rockport.

It is clear, then, that Lovecraft is not consistent with his placement of locales. Whenever he felt the need, Kingsport was Rockport, or it was Marblehead. Literary license could explain this phenomenon. Or this could be the inevitable result of writing about a place (Marblehead) which exists in a different place (Rockport) and is called by another name (Kingsport).

This has clear implications for those who attempt to understand and systematize Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos. None of Lovecraft's conceptions are intrinsically fixed. Rather, they are fluid and protean, as befits

---

16. Also, in "The Thing on the Doorstep", that story's narrator describes a drive from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to Arkham thus: "At the junction where the main highway runs inland and avoids Innsmouth I was half afraid my driver would take the bleak shore road that goes through that damnable place. He did not, however, but darted rapidly past Rowley and Ipswich toward our destination. We reached Arkham before midnight." (DH 291). This is an accurate description of Highway 293, which in Lovecraft's day went from Portsmouth to Gloucester. Even today the main roads run inland to avoid Gloucester as they did Innsmouth.

fantasy creations.

It is perhaps significant that, while Lovecraft had no compunctions over employing the gods and beings of the Cthulhu Mythos in those stories ghost-written for his revision clients, he reserved his fabled Massachusetts locales for personal use exclusively. Nowhere, in any revision story, are the potent names of Arkham, Dunwich, Kingsport, Innsmouth, or even Aylesbury invoked.<sup>17</sup> This suggests that Lovecraft felt a compelling personal ownership toward Arkham country that he did not hold toward what many consider his more influential cosmic pantheon. This, too, holds strong implications for Lovecraft scholars.

But what of Oakham itself? It is a very obscure place. Originally it was known as Rutland West Wing. It was incorporated as the town of Oakham on June 11, 1762, and named after an English town, from which many of its inhabitants originally came. Modern residents of the town—it's more of a hamlet, really—pronounce Oakham as "Oak Ham" with the stress on the last syllable. This is in contrast to the British pronunciation, which would be "Oak'am". It is interesting to note that in its early history Oakham had a reputation as a place in which churches had difficulty taking root. The only anecdote concerning the town that has come down through the years was the 1766 quote of one inhabitant who, upon hearing of yet another attempt to found a place of worship in Oakham, opined, "*Weel, if the Laard wants a church in Oakham, he must take them such as they be.*"<sup>18</sup>

With the decline of railroads at the end of the nineteenth century Oakham, like many of the so-called "hill towns" of rural Massachusetts, fell on hard times. From a high of 873 people in 1879, its 1925 population had fallen to 525. In 1980 it had risen to 994. Today it is a sleepy village virtually hidden in a wooded vale.

Oakham means "the Home of the Oak"<sup>19</sup> and it is no coincidence that those trees grow in profusion in its vicinity. With that in mind, I find very suggestive the line in "The Colour out of Space" that goes: "One of the current Arkham tales is about fat oaks that shine and move as they ought not to do at night" (DH 81).

17. Lovecraft and Price's "Through the Gates of the Silver Key" is considered, not a revision, but a collaboration.

18. D. Hamilton Hurd, History of Worcester County, Massachusetts (Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis, 1898), Vol. II, p. 1081.

19. Ibid.

# Correspondence

between R. H. Barlow and Wilson Shepherd of Oakman, Alabama

Sept.-Nov. 1932

by H. P. Lovecraft

- (a) Barlow advertises as magazine trader in various popular magazines.
- (b) Sep. 25. Shepherd answers advts. in a formless and illiterate-looking letter with (presumably fake) dictation marks. He mentions various books and magazines he has to trade, including a complete file of *Weird Tales*.
- (c) Barlow, wishing the complete W. T. file for 1923-4-5, writes Shepherd, offering to trade a set of 8 bound volumes of *Amazing Stories* in technically defective condition for this file.
- (d) Oct. 2. Shepherd replies with a strange and rambling sort of agreement—implying conditional acquiescence—which he asks Barlow to sign. Barlow complies. Shepherd replies favourably, inquiring certain particulars about bound volumes offered, and about modes of transportation.
- (e) Oct. 5. Barlow carefully and accurately explains condition of A. S. file offered, and gives suggestions as to best transportation. Asks Shepherd for final decision. At this period he is, for imperative family reasons, going back and forth between Fort Benning, Ga., and Washington, D.C.
- (f) Shepherd, in a postal sent Oct. 9, enthusiastically agrees to the trade proposed by Barlow, saying he will send desired items postpaid upon receipt of reply.
- (g) Barlow, upon returning to Ft. Benning from Washington, ships Shepherd the bound A. S. file as agreed—expecting a 1923-4-5 file of W. T. in return.
- (h) Shepherd, immediately upon receiving this shipment, sends Barlow a package of very ordinary magazines which were not ordered and which Barlow already had—back numbers of *Science Wonder Stories*, *Science Wonder Quarterly*, and *Amazing Stories Quarterly*—together with a list of titles and prices purporting to be an invoice of the shipment. This invoice lists not only the items actually sent, but the complete W. T. file for 1923-4-5 asked for; **ALTHOUGH THE WEIRD TALES FILE IS NOT INCLUDED IN THE SHIPMENT.** The prices quoted on all items are absurdly exorbitant—total value of shipped material (which did not include W. T.) not exceeding \$4.00 at ordinary market rates.

Before Barlow has had time to protest about this peculiar and erroneous shipment, he receives a letter from Shepherd (arriving the next day) dated Oct. 15th but with postscripts of the 17th, and purporting to go out simultaneously with the shipment. This letter is so wild,

irrelevant, and irrational that Barlow writes friends (as recalled without prompting by H. P. Lovecraft) that he believes he is dealing with an insane man. This letter of Shepherd's opens with an acknowledgment of the A. S. file from Barlow, but a complaint that it was in "very BAD condition". [It was not, and Barlow had explained in detail every technical defect.] It continues with a statement that, despite the "bad condition" of this shipment, Shepherd is sending Barlow the *magazines he asked for* in good condition. [Actually he did not send any magazines asked for, but sent some not asked for.] He gives rambling remarks on the "high value" of what he says he is sending, and (evidently thinking that Barlow wished magazines for speculative re-sale) adds the name of a Chicago collector\* who he says would probably buy them at a good price, since he had previously made Shepherd a high offer. Shepherd explains his own non-acceptance of that offer in a virtually insane way—saying that he is so attached to his books and magazines that he cannot bear to *sell* them—so *trades* them instead! He further adds that he has for trade or *sale* (despite his scruples) a complete set of "Science Fiction Magazine and its sister magazine INTERPLANETARY STORYS, which is 202 in 1915" [sic]. [QUERY—DID ANY SUCH MAGAZINES APPEAR IN 1915 OR AT ANY OTHER DATE, OR DID SHEPHERD INVENT MYTHICAL TITLES? No one has ever heard of these, despite inquiries.] In this letter were tucked two queer postscripts alleging that the writer was leaving on that day (Oct. 17) for Lovering, Montana, "in the middle west", on a hunting trip with a friend named William Wells, and earnestly asking Barlow *not to write him until his return*, which he puts at "Jan. or Feb." in the first P.S., and "after Xmas" in the second P.S. The second P.S. concludes: "Will send you a card when I return, so we can trade some more. THIS IS IMPORTANT. W. S."

The foregoing—illiterate, incoherent, and misspelled—is either the rambling of a mentally defective person, or the effort of a very dull, ignorant, and naive (though rattily cunning) person to put over a fraud.† The mention of two probably non-existent magazines, and the two childish postscripts evidently designed (by one whose simplicity must have been extreme) to prevent an early complaint and investigation by Barlow, speak for themselves.

This, then, is the situation. Barlow has sent Shepherd a bound file of *Amazing* which he has fully and accurately described, on the understanding that a W. T. file is to be sent in return. Shepherd at once sends a shipment of magazines *which were not asked for*, but with a pseudo-invoice implying that the shipment contains *both* these magazines and the W. T. file which was asked for. *The desired W. T. file, however, is missing.*

---

\*He first gives the name of a Pennsylvania man in typewriting, and speaks of the high price as offered by him. Then he crosses out this name and substitutes that of the Chicagoan in pencil—letting what is said about the offer stand.

†Viewed maturely, and in light of the full transaction, the evidence seems to point to the latter conclusion.

## II. Barlow v. Shepherd

This shipment of unwanted goods with false invoice is followed by a letter in which the following points should be especially noted:

1. Shepherd complains of condition of A. S. file. This is probably false, since they were sent in good shape and with safe packing. [He later denies having made this complaint.]
2. Shepherd falsely says he is sending the magazines asked for.
3. Shepherd makes peculiar and infantile remarks about re-sale.
4. Shepherd claims to have files of probably non-existent magazines.
5. Shepherd's attempts to cut off or delay investigation by Barlow by means of two irrational and curious postscripts.

Let us now consider the aftermath.

- (i) Upon receipt of the foregoing strange letter of Oct. 15-17, Barlow at once writes Shepherd (despite the puerile cautionary postscripts), telling him that the magazines received were not those ordered, and asking him to send the 1923-4-5 file of *Weird Tales* at once, as promised.
- (j) Shepherd (having apparently cancelled his "middle western" hunting trip and forgotten all about it) replies on a postcard (from Oakman) "... magazines sent at once please advise when you receive them. Am glad you were so pleased with others I sent." This obviously constitutes an admission that the desired W. T. file was not in the shipment of Oct. 15 despite the pseudo-invoice—and it also refers to an alleged statement of Barlow's (that he was "pleased" by the "other" magazines sent) which was never made. BUT NO MAGAZINES (despite statement above) ACCOMPANIED OR FOLLOWED THIS CARD.
- (k) Barlow—in Washington again—replies to the foregoing card as follows: "Dear Sir:—You don't understand. I have never gotten the *Weird Tales* you promised to trade me for the *Amazing Stories* I sent you. You sent me some things I already had and did not need or want instead. Please send me the 1923, 1924, and 1925 *Weird Tales* at once. Yours sincerely, R. H. Barlow."

Note this actual text in view of irrelevant reply.

- (l) Replying to the foregoing on a postal postmarked Nov. 8 (from Oakman—the trip with Mr. Wells being still postponed!), Shepherd presents the ensuing illiterate and irrelevant scrawl which Barlow believes to be a deliberate bit of insulting jeering aimed at a neatly gypped victim:

"Sir—Am very glad that you are so satisfied with my mags. as to comment on them two times, it will be glad to let you have all the books and mags. you said you wanted in your letter. but the Argosys. but if you make a good enough offer I might trade. please let me know what you will give at once. Respectfully W. S."

[The crude cunning implied in this card contrasts oddly with the utter naiveté of Shepherd as elsewhere displayed.]

- (m) Barlow replies to the foregoing irrelevant and possibly insolent card as follows:

"Dear Sir—Your postal card received. I have not yet received the years 1923, 1924, and 1925 of *Weird Tales* (in good condition) which you said you had sent. Please send them at once as agreed upon. Yours sincerely, R. H. Barlow. P.S. If you don't straighten out this matter at once I shall turn your letters over to the Postal Authorities and let them do as they see fit. R. B."

- (n) Shepherd replies to the foregoing at length—with an illiterate pretended résumé of the correspondence betwixt him and Barlow; in which he tries to tell Barlow that the latter wrote things he didn't write, and also misrepresents his own past correspondence—with incredible naiveté, as if Barlow had no letters—or no memory—to consult! He begins by telling Barlow that the latter in his first letter asked for an option on the W. T. file (which he *did*) and also on some Argosy issues (which he *did not*)—offering in return an Amazing file "in frankly very poor condition". Continuing, he says that he agreed to reserve the desired magazines for Barlow if the latter would sign a definite option; and that he offered to throw in some other items to compensate Barlow for committing himself to this option. Further, he denies that he asked Barlow to send the Amazing file when the latter *did*—despite documentary evidence to the contrary—and claims that when he told Barlow (in the strange letter of Oct. 15-17) he was sending "the magazines asked for", he meant the *thrown-in items* . . . for which he thought Barlow had asked. Evidently he does not know (or thinks he can successfully deny!) what he wrote in the strange letter; for he claims that he reported the Amazing set "in fair condition", whereas he really complained [falsely] to Barlow that they were in "very BAD condition". He ignores his own silly postscripts to that letter, and says he expressed a desire to do some more trading. [How more, when the original trade was not complete?] Shepherd then invents a purely fictitious reply which he says Barlow sent—instead of the complaint (of un-ordered magazines recd., and non-receipt of ordered file of W. T.) which Barlow *really did* send. He claims that in this reply Barlow reported everything received in "wonderful" condition, and that Barlow did not expect W. T. file to be included. He claims that, in the same letter, Barlow asked him to continue holding the W. T. file until he could arrange for it [. . . as if B. had not already sent the Amazings forming his side of the trade! If the magazines sent by S. were only to clinch an option, then what did he think B. sent the Amazings for?]. He ignores completely the pseudo-invoice—also his own reply to Barlow's first complaint—in which he said "magazines sent at once—advise me when you receive them."

The utter simplicity of S. in fancying he could make B. believe the transaction was otherwise than it had been, really presents a psychological problem—unless there was an element of pure conscious bluff.

- (o) At this point Barlow drops the matter in disgust. Shepherd has B.'s file of *Amazing*, worth about \$31.00, and Barlow has a file of duplicate junk not worth over \$4.00—with no W. T. file in sight. B. does not believe that S. ever had a W. T. file—suspicion in this direction being augmented by S.'s description of probably non-existent magazines of 1915 et seq.

HERE RESTS THE CASE

# Lovecraft and Chiasmus,

# / Chiasmus and Lovecraft

by Donald R. Burleson, Ph.D.

Central to the craft of any fine writer is the ability to create the requisite tensions and rhythmic flow of a piece of writing through a healthy combination of rhetorical and syntactic forms. H. P. Lovecraft evidently learned much of this art by reading his admired neoclassical authors of eighteenth-century England, who in turn derived their own sense of linguistic integrity and propriety from Augustan models for whom the notion of efficacious and well-balanced language was paramount.

The primary rhetorical form around which a writer may creatively design his syntax is that of parallelism, by which different prose or prosodical utterances reflect each other by having comparable items in comparable positions, as when Lovecraft's narrative voice in *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* describes College Hill in Providence as being "crowned by the vast new Christian Science Dome as London is crowned by St. Paul's",<sup>1</sup> or when the narrator in "The Statement of Randolph Carter" says, "Vision or nightmare it may have been—vision or nightmare I fervently hope it was . . ." (MM 300). Clearly, however, a story or novel or poem would be structurally and tonally monotonous if its syntax consisted of an unrelieved use of parallelism, and, aside from such other devices as the periodic sentence, perhaps the chief alternative rhetorical form a writer to which a writer may appeal for an effective variety is that of *chiasmus*, a device which not only modulates the flow of prose or poetry when judiciously interspersed with parallelistic forms (parallelism being the dominant, chiasmus being the minor form), but does so in a manner conducing to poetic balance of linguistic elements, setting up pleasing tensions (often unconscious relations) in the mind of the reader. Chiasmus derives its name from the form of the Greek letter *chi* ( $\chi$ ), suggesting a crossing-over of sentence elements by which the second half of what would otherwise be a parallelism is inverted to produce the form ABBA.

Neoclassical writers sometimes employed chiasmus in prose; see, for instance, Joseph Addison (in *The Spectator*, No. 10, Monday, 12 March 1711): "I shall endeavour to enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality." But the device chiefly occurs in the heroic couplets of their poetry. (They had, of course, been anticipated in this in earlier poets, particularly John Milton, and even that Elizabethan master of form Edmund Spenser.) See, for one among numerous examples, Lovecraft's revered Alex-

---

1. H. P. Lovecraft, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, in *At the Mountains of Madness and Other Novels*, ed. August Derleth and S. T. Joshi (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1985), p. 115. Further references to this volume will be denoted MM in the text.



ander Pope, in *The Rape of the Lock*:

The hungry judges soon the sentence sign,  
And wretches hang that jurymen may dine.

Here the elements of the chiasmus operate at the imagistic level rather than the strict verbal level of the Addison example; the image of "hungry judges" is echoed at the end by "dine", while in the middle the image of "sentence" is followed by that suggested in the words "wretches hang". Pope, of course, was also known to employ chiasmus in its stricter form, as in this line from *Eloisa to Abelard*: "Rise in the grove, before the altar rise. . . ." Even here the form is flexible in application, in that "in the grove" and "before the altar" reflect each other merely by being prepositional phrases similarly employed. The writers of this period clearly recognised the power of this device, applicable in many variations and at various linguistic levels, to enhance their effusions by gently varying the otherwise largely parallelistic flow of their sentences and by charming the reader's mind with a sense of verbal balance.

And Lovecraft recognised this as well. Like William Faulkner, Lovecraft began his writing career as a poet, later carrying forward an abundance of poetic principles that would profoundly colour the prose writing to which he had turned. While much of Lovecraft's poetry, particularly the early efforts, may be of little enduring artistic value, the experience of writing it did leave him with a lasting sense of linguistic control, and even among the poems themselves one finds worthy accomplishments here and there.

The poetry, while in the vast majority of instances exhibiting parallel structure, does afford some examples of variegation by the device of chiasmus. One sees, for instance, in "The Nightmare Lake",<sup>2</sup> the lines

In nightmares only it is told  
What scenes beneath those beams unfold;  
What scenes, too old for human sight,  
Lie sunken there in endless night. . . .

Here the repetition "night(mares)", "scenes", "scenes", "night" reveals the pattern. It seems, though, to be in his poems structured around the true heroic couplet that Lovecraft is most inclined to make use of this device, reflecting the influence of such of his idols as Pope and Dryden. See, for such an example, his "To Templeton and Mount Monadnock" (CP 42), in which we find:

. . . Silent, pine-girt hill  
Whose majesty could move a Whittier's quill;

---

2. Lovecraft, "The Nightmare Lake", in *Collected Poems* (Arkham House, 1963), p. 66. Further references to this volume will be denoted CP in the text.

Whose distant brow the humbler pen excites;  
Whose purpled slope the raptur'd gaze invites . . .

("move", "quill", "pen", "excites" for an imagistic chiasmus rather reminiscent of those of Pope). The last two lines, of course, also show a parallelism, illustrating how well the two forms work in concert; and Lovecraft here also employs the device of anaphora, in the repetition of "whose". But even in poems of far different structure, the ABBA pattern may be discerned, as in this example, on the phonemic level, from "Nemesis" (CP 85):

Where they roll in their horror unheeded, without  
knowledge or lustre or name.

While chiasmus is usually understood to operate by way of larger syntactic elements or images, its characteristic pattern may emerge in linguistic units as small as phonemes, where it produces an effect more subtly pleasing than ordinary alliteration or consonance.

But we find by far the more notable Lovecraftian use of chiasmus in his prose, particularly in those tales of a genuinely poetic cast. Even in works of lesser poetic inclination the device is noticeable. The novel *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, for instance, is a work narrated (for all its other scarcely deniable kinds of appeal) in a rather repertorial manner not attaining to the beauty of the more colourful tales, but it does yield up some examples of Lovecraft's use of chiasmus to vary and enhance the general flow of his syntax, as when (concerning Charles Ward's activities at the Pawtucket bungalow) the narrator says, "Before long queer tales began to circulate regarding the all-night burning of lights; and somewhat later, after this burning had suddenly ceased, there rose still queerer tales . . ." (MM 179); or when he describes Ward's (actually Curwen's) typewritten communications: "Those notes are not in Ward's normal style; not even in the style of that last frantic letter to Willett" (MM 186). These examples, however, are sparse and relatively unimpressive, and to see, in the novel, a more typical usage, one must look to Orne's letter to Curwen—"Ask of the Lesser, lest the Greater shall not wish to Answer" (MM 138)—where Lovecraft abandons the more general prosaic style of the novel to imitate seventeenth-century prose, the immediate forerunner of his admired neoclassicism. Overall, in any case, one must appeal to less dryly narrated tales, where effective examples abound.

Many of these are obvious and structurally simple, as when the famous subject of Richard Pickman's painting (reflecting Goya's Saturn) "glared and gnawed and gnawed and glared"<sup>3</sup>; as, similarly, certain entities "pawed and groped and groped and pawed" in *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath* (MM 404); or when the narrator of "The Colour out of Space" remarks, of the blasted heath, that "no other name could fit such a thing, or any other

3. Lovecraft, "Pickman's Model", in *The Dunwich Horror and Others*, ed. August Derleth and S. T. Joshi (Arkham House, 1984), p. 23. Further references to this volume will be denoted DH in the text.

thing fit such a name" (DH 55); or when Johansen in "The Call of Cthulhu" experiences "hysterical plunges from the pit to the moon and from the moon back again to the pit" (DH 154); or when the narrator of that same tale remarks, in the final apocalyptic paragraph, "What has risen may sink, and what has sunk may rise" (DH 154); or when the narrator of "The Shadow out of Time" says, "The particular structure I was in was known to me. Known, too, was its place in that terrible elder city of dream" (DH 417); or when the narrator of "The Dreams in the Witch House" opens the tale with "Whether the dreams brought on the fever or the fever brought on the dreams Walter Gilman did not know" (MM 262); or when the autobiographically philosophical narrative voice of "The Silver Key" remarks that "the blind cosmos grinds aimlessly on from nothing to something and from something back to nothing again" (MM 409).

And of course there is that resounding double chiasmus from the *Necronomicon* in "The Dunwich Horror": "Man rules now where They ruled once; They shall soon rule where man rules now. After summer is winter, and after winter summer" (DH 170). (Lovecraft had much earlier employed a two-chiasmus structure in the opening lines of "The Doom That Came to Sarnath": "There is in the land of Mnar a vast still lake that is fed by no stream and out of which no stream flows. Ten thousand years ago there stood by its shore the mighty city of Sarnath, but Sarnath stands there no more."<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, the pattern of the second sentence is actually ABCCBA, a level-topped pyramidal form, where "there" is in one instance an expletive and, in the other, an adverb of place; the pattern generates three instances of chiasmus folded together; ABBA, BCCB, and ACCA, the first two being more solid in sense and rhythm than the third. This sentence also suggests, in a wedding of sense to form, the coming and going of the mighty city.)

The simplicity of most of these examples notwithstanding, Lovecraft is by no means limited to such straightforward employment of the device of chiasmus. One could hardly find a more pleasing example than that reflection of the Outsider: ". . . it were better to glimpse the sky and perish, than to live without ever beholding day" (DH 48). Here the pattern involves verbs of like meaning ("glimpse", "beholding") on the outside, with opposites ("perish", "live") on the inside, and the effect is highly poetic. Clearly, when Lovecraft later disparaged "The Outsider" as an overwritten tale, he was being unduly harsh as a self-critic. In this and the preceding examples, he employs chiasmus as an effective payoff against other forms for a very effective prose style.

Lovecraft's conscious or unconscious inclination toward the ABBA pattern can on occasion even be discerned on as subtle a level as that of narrative point of view. In particular, "The Terrible Old Man" (DH 272-74) opens with an editorialising narrator (ironic in tone to the point of sarcasm) whose stance is essentially omniscient; the point of view narrows to that of Messrs. Ricci, Czaneck, and Silva, planning to rob the old man; the point of view narrows a little further to the con-

(Continued on p. 80)

4. Lovecraft, "The Doom That Came to Sarnath", in Dagon and Other Macabre Tales (Arkham House, 1965), p. 34.

# Reviews

H. P. LOVECRAFT. *Commonplace Book*. Edited by David E. Schultz. West Warwick, RI: Necronomicon Press, 1987 (forthcoming). 2 vols. Reviewed by Steven J. Mariconda.

H. P. Lovecraft used the *Commonplace Book* from 1919 (or 1920) until his death in 1937 as a place to write down images and ideas which struck his fancy, for possible later use in his fiction. It is a document of almost unending fascination, for reading it is the closest we can get to peering directly into the author's imagination. David E. Schultz has undertaken the formidable task of discovering the sources and uses of the entries in Lovecraft's little book. The result is a critical landmark so comprehensive—the breadth of the information here is perhaps unprecedented in Lovecraft studies—that it lends much to our understanding of how Lovecraft's imagination worked and how his imaginings became finished works of art. It will serve as an ideal for future undertakings of a similar kind.

Schultz is a leading Lovecraft scholar, and perhaps the most active critic in amateur journalism—his publications have since the mid-seventies been staples of the amateur press associations devoted to Lovecraft. He was among the first to advocate some of the tenets of what S. T. Joshi has in these pages called "modern" Lovecraft criticism: the establishment of a sound chronology for Lovecraft's tales; the study of those tales in the order in which they were written, to observe the development of important themes and techniques; the explosion of the Cthulhu Mythos; the establishment of a sound bibliography (see his *H. P. Lovecraft: The Anthologies* [Strange Co., 1975]). Schultz has also emphasized the centrality of dreams and dream-motifs in Lovecraft, and is currently working on an annotated edition of *Fungi from Yuggoth*. His recent efforts, however, have largely been devoted to the annotation of the *Commonplace Book*, and this Necronomicon Press publication is the fruit of five years of intermittent work. The level of detail and thoroughness of Schultz's product make the reader quickly realize that the editor is by nature a perfectionist.

The book begins with a fine introductory essay describing the history of the *Commonplace Book*, the nature of its entries, the part the latter played in story-writing, and the physical aspect of the book itself (we are even given several charts showing the disposition of leaves and location of entries in the original manuscripts). Schultz refrains from much critical discussion, perhaps because of space limitations—as it is, the introduction is somewhat longer than the text of the *Commonplace Book* itself—but we may hope for future articles from his pen on his interpretation of the importance of Lovecraft's notebook in the creative process. More pertinent to the text is the detailed history of its transmission here. To say that the

history is a confusing one is an understatement; but the author has somehow unravelled it, and presents a lucid account of his research, lending insight into the Lovecraft scene of the 1940s along the way.

As for the notebook itself, for the first time we have a text that is both complete and accurately rendered. Schultz has taken almost no editorial liberties in his presentation, instead attempting to give us a feel for the autograph manuscript of the notebook. Although this makes reading a bit difficult, it is the next best thing to having the A.Ms. itself—we can see, for example, how Lovecraft centered certain items or made later additions and deletions. Some of the 222 entries are banal, but the majority are fascinating—what we have here is the distilled essence of Lovecraft's fancy, undiluted by short story conventions and other encumbrances.

The annotation of these entries is the main feature of the book, in both bulk (more than four times the length of the text itself) and merit. The notes are concerned with specifically identifying both the sources of the entries—"dreams, things read, casual incidents, idle conceptions, & so on", as Lovecraft put it—and their place of eventual use in Lovecraft's work. Schultz has annotated nearly every entry in Lovecraft's notebook, and in general has succeeded in being plausible and to the point. Unfortunately, this type of project has some necessary evils—it is never quite done, for one is always accidentally coming across new sources (in unpublished letters, typically) and uses; and each reader will undoubtedly recognize some use of the entries in the fiction that the editor has missed. For entry 53 ("Hand of dead man writers"), for example, it might be mentioned that "Cool Air" and "The Thing on the Doorstep" feature similar events. In the end, though, it is at the discretion of the editor about how far to reach for a connection and what to omit.

We may say, however, that Schultz has done an admirable job in walking this fine line, and confidently state that his product is about as definitive as possible given these problems. The number and diversity of sources used here is mind-boggling: everything from *Argosy All-Story Magazine* to Baring-Gould's *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages* to Elliot's *Modern Science and Materialism* to (rather embarrassingly) one of Lovecraft's favorites, the 9th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Not surprisingly, Lovecraft's letters yield many clues to the sources, and Schultz's primary research in the collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society has turned up much hitherto unknown information. Extensive consultation with other Lovecraft scholars, in a process that anticipates the execution of Joshi's *Collected Works*, has helped insure that little is overlooked.

The annotation section is so rich, in fact, that one hardly knows what to cite as examples. We learn about how Lovecraft might have developed entries into stories he never got around to writing—entry 133, for instance, about a circus freak whose surgically detached "little anthropoid excrescence" takes on a hellish life of its own (Henry S. Whitehead based his story "Cassius" on this entry), or entries 7 and 9, in which a Civil War surgeon is killed by his own undead creation. Schultz demonstrates, too, that Lovecraft's use of the entries ranged from the incidental to the

central. Entry 60 ("Fisherman casts his net into the sea—what he finds" [tentatively dated 1919]), for instance, was casually tossed into "The Haunter of the Dark" (1935), while entry 182 ("In an ancient buried city a man finds a mouldering prehistoric document in *English & in his own handwriting*, telling an incredible tale" [tentatively dated 1930]) served as the plot-germ for "The Shadow out of Time" (1934-35).

The reader also gains many small insights into the way Lovecraft's mind worked. For example, entry 155—"Steeped town seen from afar at sunset—*does not light up at night*. Sail has been seen putting out to sea." This takes on a great deal of force after we learn that one of Lovecraft's favorite ways to experience an atmosphere of antique quaintness was to watch the windows of Marblehead or Providence light up, one after the other, at dusk. Thus, the failure of a town to light up at night would seem to him a horrible perversion of the normal.

Enlightening as all these tidbits are, the real value of this book is in its broader implications on Lovecraft's work. A pattern begins to take shape as Schultz points out the same themes emerging in many entries: displaced identity, the dream-world impinging on the real world, the reanimated dead, the past impinging on the present, the mind shedding the body and wandering through time and space, artifacts that are imbued with cosmic abnormality. These are the actual ideas or experiences that Lovecraft wished to communicate, and this volume helps us become more aware of them. We can reread the author's works with a new recognition of his thematic intent, and follow more closely the means by which he embodies his themes in fiction.

Similarly, we begin also to note that Lovecraft's imagination returned again and again to imagery which best expressed his moods—crooked, antique city streets, oily black rivers, strange gardens, forbidden books, buildings that hide terrible secrets, the gateway to supra-reality. This is significant, from a critical perspective, because fictional themes are usually not explicit—that is, they are usually conveyed through imagery and symbolism. Again, in rereading the works, we can pick up on these hints of thematic statement and recognize pertinent imagery, and gradually come to a fuller understanding of Lovecraft's original experience. Schult's *Commonplace Book* (and his planned *Fungi from Yuggoth* even more so) shows that there is in Lovecraft a finite set of images which crop up continually in both his poetry and fiction, and the volume will doubtless both incite and assist the work that needs to be done on this approach.

One can hardly hope to do more than touch on the many appealing aspects of this critical study of Lovecraft's notebook. Basically, the vast amount of information in the annotations helps to remind us that Lovecraft's stories did not just spring into being and do not exist only in the pages of an Arkham House book or paperback. Aside from being just plain fascinating reading, the volume helps us understand what Lovecraft intended in his works, what choices he made in their composition, and what effects he sought. This makes it a must for anyone looking for more insight into the imagination and artistry of the twentieth century's finest author of fantastic fiction.

H. P. LOVECRAFT. *Uncollected Letters*. Edited by S. T. Joshi. West Warwick, RI: Necronomicon Press, 1986. iv, 47 pp. \$5.95 pb. Reviewed by Robert M. Price.

"What a rich treasure-house of data for the biographer and reviewer!" So H. P. Lovecraft self-satirically remarks of his personal library. His modesty forbade him imagine that one day his words would apply in sober truth to his letters, including those finally collected in this fascinating volume, from which the above quote is taken. As editor S. T. Joshi reminds us in his helpful introduction, this collection scarcely represents the tip of the iceberg where the uncollected letters are concerned. A recent reader debate in the pages of *Fantasy Commentator* concerned how many scores or hundreds of volumes all of Lovecraft's letters, could they be recovered, would fill. Those in the present collection have for the most part been previously published, though in obscure sources: the letters pages of pulp or fan magazines and amateur journals for the most part. Those addressed to *Weird Tales* were included in Necronomicon Press' earlier volume, *Lovecraft in "The Eyrle"*, now out of print. (That volume also contained reader comments on Lovecraft's work and is still worth trying to find.)

These letters contain no great revelations. They are pretty much more of what we find in the Arkham House collections. But of course that is a merit, not a demerit, as readers of those collections will attest. Lovecraft's life and opinions come through clearly, e.g. his wistful recollections of how he had hoped one day to join the Brown University faculty, or his admiration for "that noble but much maligned band of Southerners who protected their homes against the diabolical freed blacks and Northern adventurers in the years of misgovernment just after the Civil War—the dreaded Ku-Klux-Klan."

Many are primarily interested in Lovecraft's letters for the light they shed on his writings and his writing technique. This collection provides a number of such insights. Who would have guessed, for instance, that "Facts concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family" was prompted by Lovecraft's reading of Anderson's *Weinsburg, Ohio*? How interesting that in order to keep his descriptions consistent, Lovecraft had drawn pictures of Cthulhu and the crinoid Old Ones before writing the stories. And there is at least one new bit of imaginary data on the *Necronomicon*: the Spanish edition appeared in 1623, a more specific date than that given in "History of the *Necronomicon*". It is amusing to see Lovecraft having to disillusion young readers Jim Blish and William Miller who thought the tome of Alhazred actually existed. "I feel quite guilty every time I hear of someone's having spent valuable time looking up the *Necronomicon* at public libraries."

As to the technique of writing weird fiction, Lovecraft provides valuable hints both as to structure and as to mood and narrative point of view. Much of this was later taken up into his various essays on weird and "interplanetary" fiction.

Not only Lovecraft the writer, but also Lovecraft the reader is on display here. It is fascinating to see Lovecraft's letters of comment on var-

ious authors and stories appearing in *All-Story Magazine* and *Weird Tales*. He was a great aficionado of Edgar Rice Burroughs, yet had to wink at Burroughs' occasional scientific lapses. Oriental romances he found "contemptibly disgusting, unspeakably nauseating".

A sizeable chunk of these letters deals with amateur journalism. We can see how seriously Lovecraft took the movement. With what patience and concern he weathered the periodic teapot tempests that are sometimes so reminiscent of today's squabbling amateur press associations. It is interesting to note the implied comparisons in the letters between Lovecraft's opinion of his fellow amateurs and his attitude toward the pulp magazine readership. He rejoices that amateurdom in his day had passed beyond its childhood days: "the amateur world was then almost wholly given over to crude and half-educated youths . . . when literature was at a low ebb, and nothing occupied the stage but the low bickerings and cheap festivities of very mediocre individuals." Of *Weird Tales*, on the other hand, he wrote: "You can see what a hopelessly vulgar and stupid rabble comprise the bulk of the clientele. These yaps and nitwits probably can't grasp anything even remotely approaching subtlety." He has similarly derisive things to say of the "circle of enthusiastic adolescent 'fans' which has grown up around these ['cheap pulp science-fiction'] magazines." One can only note how today's amateur journalism movement has sunk to the level of merely one more department of the adolescent fandom Lovecraft bemoaned, though on the other hand the rise of today's "fan scholarship" centering on Lovecraft himself is a welcome development that might have surprised Lovecraft very much.

Finally, Jason C. Eckhardt's inspired cover for the volume must be noted. With his characteristic gift, Eckhardt has created a haunting scene of written pages blowing from the hand of the reader across an eldritch vista of ancient stone structures.

*Continued from p. 75*

sciousness of Czanek, waiting in the auto and encountering the old man; the story ends with a return of the ironic-toned and editorialisign narrator, to complete the pattern. While the term chiasmus generally does not refer to such considerations as narrative point of view, its characterising pattern may here be observed on that level, so that as a habit of mind in Lovecraft the pattern seems to range from the phonemic level through the level of syntax all the way up to the most global level that a story may encompass. Clearly chiasmus and kindred phenomena are a substantial facet of that body of poetic instinct that Lovecraft, the poet-turned-fiction-writer, brought to his work from early literary encounters with his classical and neoclassical mentors.



Necronomicon Press

\$4.00

# AMAZING STORIES

APRIL  
25 Cents



**A  
COSMIC  
JUKEBOX  
SCAN**

